

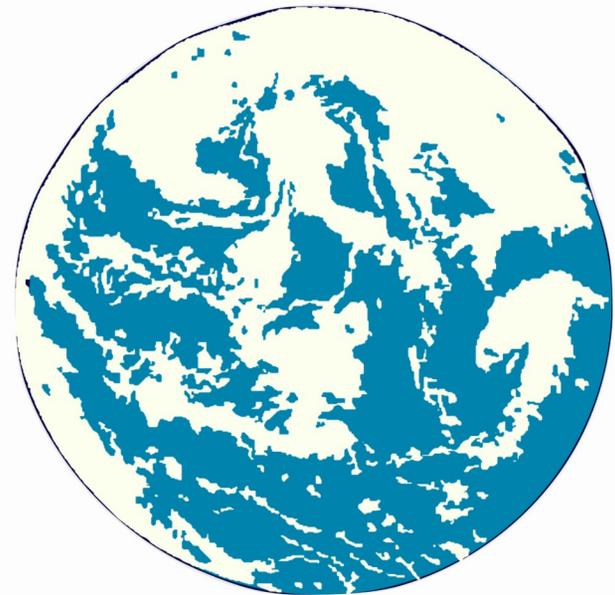
Life illuminates the Earth with awareness and mystifies reality with meaning. Anthropogenic climate change threatens to extirpate an epochal diversity of known Life in the Universe. Mass media does not commensurately attend to this prospect: ABC News covered the Royal Baby more in one week than climate change in all of 2018.[8] Why?



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# MANUFACTURING CATASTROPHE

HOW AND WHY MAINSTREAM MEDIA  
MINIMIZES CLIMATE CHANGE



A QUESTION AND ANSWER PAMPHLET  
FOR THE PEOPLE

Q: What is mainstream media?

A: Mainstream media is the set of media companies that dominate mass mediums. Also known as corporate/mass/monopoly media, mainstream media consists of cable news channels, major periodicals, film studios, and the like. The corporate press is the subset of mainstream media companies that deal in news. Mainstream media has a monopoly on the information and symbols that get disseminated widely to the public, as alternative media only reaches small audiences of niche consumers. Five companies control 90 percent of US media.[1]

Q: What's the problem with mainstream media?

A: Mainstream media outlets are (subsidiaries of) for-profit corporations acting in the system of capitalism. Therefore, their central objective is to maximize quarterly gain for their shareholders, the majority of which are multibillion-dollar financial institutions.[2] Because corporations are responsible to stockowners first, capitalist accumulation comes at the expense of workers and the environment, as businesses exploit cheap labor and extract resources in the most efficient manner, no matter how ecologically devastating that may be, in an effort to increase surplus value for the owning class.[3] Mainstream news sources rely on advertising to generate revenue, meaning they need to sell marketing opportunities to other corporations. Because of this arrangement, mainstream media cannot sincerely critique corporate capitalism, as it would be self-sabotage to challenge the very system on which their business model depends.

Q: Mainstream sources don't criticize capitalism, so what?

A: They propagandize it. Mainstream media's most consequential accomplishment is the widespread inculcation of unquestioned consumer capitalism. First of all, the corporate press runs ads that instill consumer culture. Far worse, since mainstream broadcasts and publications are the only sources of information that effortlessly reach the masses, and because they perpetually contest, if not ignore, critical analysis of the system of capitalism, they end up prescribing it.

even if they come at the expense of deadly future losses. Business as usual presumes infinite growth on a finite planet. As already set forth, *it is not the case* that mainstream media downplays climate change by way of focusing on more engaging, and therefore more profitable, subject matter. To the contrary, the climate crisis presents a unique opportunity for awesome and sensational, thus bankable, story telling. Instead, because capitalist accumulation causes climate change, by downplaying the issue mainstream sources avoid having to call into question the process that generates profit in the first place. In a word, mass media companies do not minimize climate change because they are too busy *making* short-term profit, but, much more fundamentally, *they do so to protect from mass disapproval the whole enterprise of short-term profit making*.

Q: What do we do?

A: Consume critically. Study climate science (read papers in *Nature Climate Change*). Explore social science (start with Native American history and graduate to Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift). Peruse not-for-profit publications at their intersect like *Climate and Capitalism*. Make a list of independent and alternative sources that consistently apply decent moral standards, maintain respectable historical records, and publish global perspectives, especially those that confront tyranny and champion the oppressed. Watch *Koyaanisqatsi*. Unlearn everything. Then act. Mostly listen, but talk too. Spreading the word goes much further than people appreciate. Also ride a bike. Garden, share, resist, do what feels right. Another world is possible. Good luck.

Q: Sources?

A: Scan the QR Code on the back cover to access supplemental files, including a list of sources corresponding to endnotes [1] to [22]. To reproduce this pamphlet for free, download the pdf, *print landscape and double-sided with long-edge binding*, fold the second paper into the first.

stood to profit from frequent and honest climate coverage, they couldn't in reality for one simple reason. *Climate change is caused by the very system of capital accumulation that sustains mainstream media companies.* Corporations disharmonize nature when they plunder ecosystems for nonrenewable resources, manufacture unnecessary products, ship them across the world unsustainably, and poison the biosphere with waste. This rapacious activity is executed at incomprehensible speeds and on devastating scales. Corporate capitalism thus affects climate change more than anything else. Worthwhile analyses of climate change cannot ignore the history of capitalism, and workable solutions must advocate for the end of corporate capitalism as we know it.[22] Therefore, major media companies need to dodge the issue *by definition.* They aren't just choosing more lucrative stories to tell. There is no choice for them to make. *Mainstream news sources genuinely could not sustain serious reporting on the issue of climate change,* because if they were honest they would connect climate change to capitalism and thereby alienate major advertisers and investors, which would risk revenue, hence the ability to disseminate information to the masses. In other words, any news outlet that commits itself to adequate climate coverage consequently forfeits the resources it would need to be mainstream. Under present conditions, if climate change really threatened civilization – as a matter of fact it does – mass media could not inform us. Whether or not they would is a worthless question.

Q: If climate change threatens civilization, it poses a risk to the system of capitalism. Why would the corporate press underplay climate change if it endangered future accumulation?

Due to the principle that returns on investment are better made sooner rather than later, the owning class continues to discount the changing climate to the end of ensuring short-term profit. Crucially, corporations do not merely maximize shareholder wealth. They function explicitly to make stockholders as wealthy as possible, *as fast as possible, ad infinitum.* According to the impossible logic of capitalism, corporations can go on making next-quarter profits forever,

The bulk of this propagandization is carried out unconsciously. Mass entertainment media inculcates the images and icons of capitalism. Corporate newspeople, often having graduated from elite private schools, are hired at major media companies precisely for their uncriticalness towards existing power structures.[4] Thus, mainstream commentators naturally and genuinely downplay, when they don't ignore, news that reflects unfavorably on the economic status-quo. They do this actively (e.g., by playing "both sides") and passively (e.g., by reporting systemic consequences as independent events). A serious critic of capitalism would never achieve a position of influence in mainstream media, indeed none have. Sometimes unorthodox takes are published in unnoticed places, but never enough to gain much attention. Furthermore, news industry editors reserve the right to unilaterally redraft stories before they reach the public. As a result, journalists self-censor, whereby they come to exclude facts and suppress sentiments that they know their editor would disfavor or delete. Editors report to CEOs on boards of directors.

Q: Sure, but I'm free to read and watch what I want right? Why don't people just find better sources?

A: In theory individuals can engage with whatever news sources they find to be the best. The reality is that quality, alternative publications, although numerous, are for all intents and purposes undiscoverable. Some of the richest and most powerful (media) companies in the world, such as Google, Facebook, household publishers and broadcast networks, broadly control the distribution of information. Anyone can produce anything they want, the challenge lies in finding an audience. For-profit companies determine what you get, and even more importantly what you don't get, when you search the web, turn on the television, and so on.[5] This state of affairs is problematic seeing as it would be against the best interest of multibillion-dollar corporations to surface information that calls into question the system of capital growth from which they derive their power. Furthermore, monopoly media sets the boundaries of acceptable politics in virtue of its ubiquity. Dissenting perspectives are considered

“radical”, “unrealistic”, or just plain whacky in popular discourse, however rational or evidenced they might be.

Q: So everything I read in the corporate press is propaganda?

A: No! In fact, on issues that can be covered honestly in the absence of systemic analysis, mainstream news sources can be excellent. Although weak language and out of touch presuppositions abound, that which gets published is not usually problematic. What really matters are the events and opinions that are omitted and marginalized, rather than headlined. Major news media companies appease their shareholders and advertisers every time they ignore a case of corporate exploitation. When problems brought about by capitalism become too big for mainstream sources to ignore, it's better for business that they scapegoat foreign countries and domestic minorities. Major media corporations also wield algorithms that facilitate endless entertainment.[6][7]

Q: What's the most important thing that mainstream media mistreats?

A: Climate change, taking for granted the understanding that it is the biggest story of our time, if not the most important event in human history. The corporate press has virtually ignored climate change, at best relegating crucial reports to back pages. Examples of incommensurate climate coverage are inexhaustible. Infamously, ABC News spent more time on the Royal Baby in one week than on climate change in all of 2018, the fourth hottest year on record.[8][9] In 2019, when atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels surpassed 415 parts per million for the first time since the Pliocene Epoch 3 million years ago, no major publications reported the measure, even though Exxon Mobil predicted it decades in advance.[10][11][12] Instead, the morning after the climacteric was recorded the front page of the New York Times worried about the economics of “Trump's Trade War”, the plight of the jobless in “Coal Country”, and the impending “5G Apocalypse”. [13] Mainstream media hasn't brought attention to the fact that land surface temperatures in Siberia now exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit annually, threatening the stability of permafrost that stores significantly

more carbon than is in the atmosphere.[14][15][16] These are not facts that people should have to seek out, given what's at stake. Twenty percent of all human deaths are caused by fossil fuel emissions.[17] A press that serves the public would track corporate pollution in an effort to safeguard global health. The corporate press, which serves tycoons, tracks the stock market as a measure of “economic health”. Citizens are also uninformed about inspiring environmental developments, such as the *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*. [18] Increasingly severe extreme weather events continue to be treated as shocking anomalies in mainstream news, which blames “Humanity” for the overt climate crimes that mass media is an accessory to.[19][20] Ecocide is not in “Human Nature”. Humans have lived on Earth for hundreds of millennia. Most of us have not fatally robbed or contaminated the planet. Corporations have. Anthropogenic climate change coincides with the ascent of industrial capitalism, which major media protects by maligning Humanity.

Q: But that's because most people don't care about climate change and capitalism. Mass media produces content that people want to consume.

A: Vice versa. Corporate media manufactures interests. Things that are marketed and attended to the most in mass media become culturally significant in virtue of the attention they receive. In other words, popular concern is socialized via media coverage. Nevertheless, most people *are* concerned with climate change, in one way or another, because they experience it. In fact, the *Yale Program on Climate Change Communication* has found that more than 3/4 of US citizens are expressly interested in news stories pertaining to climate change.[21] No matter, a minimally decent media would inform the masses about the state of the climate.

Q: Why does mainstream media ignore climate change if it really poses such a big risk?

A: Never mind the fact that climate change is the greatest known threat to civilization, even if corporate media in theory